

## ABSTRACT

A query interpretation method and system uses a combination of context-independent and contextual evaluation to compute interpretations for multiple-term queries. The present invention can be used to search a collection of items, each of which  
5 is associated with one or more terms. In certain embodiments, query interpretation involves generating several candidate multiple-term interpretations and scoring them to select one or more interpretations. In certain embodiments, query interpretation involves identifying single-term interpretations for the terms in the query, determining context-independent scores for those single-term interpretations, pruning candidate single-term  
10 interpretations, identifying a plurality of candidate multiple-term interpretations, determining a contextual score for each candidate multiple-term interpretation, which may involve using different semantic approaches, and generating one or more multiple-term interpretations that are optimal with respect to a combination of the context-independent and contextual scoring functions.